



Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.

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Testimony of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.
Elizabeth Cafarella, Director of Public Policy and Communication
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Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian and members of the Committee, my name is Elizabeth Cafarella, and I am the Director of Public Policy and Communication at the Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc. (CONNSACS).

CONNSACS is the statewide association of nine community-based rape crisis centers in Connecticut. Our mission is to end sexual violence and ensure high quality, comprehensive and culturally competent sexual assault victim services. I am here today to talk about the work that our nine member rape crisis centers do, and let you know how devastating it would be to victims of sexual assault in the state of Connecticut if their funding were imperiled.

During fiscal year 2007-2008 CONNSACS' community-based program staff and volunteers provided services to 4,166 sexual assault victims and their families. Our member centers also provided risk reduction and prevention education to nearly 34,000 children and youth and to over 5,000 members of the general public and training for close to 2,500 professionals, including law enforcement personnel.

Funding sexual assault crisis services is an important investment in our communities. CONNSACS provides sexual assault crisis services to men, women, boys, and girls, as well as those we identify as secondary victims: parents, spouses, partners, and siblings. Unfortunately, funding for rape crisis services through the Department of Public Health has already decreased by more than 10% since 2001 when adjusted for the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Since 1990, funding for rape crisis services has decreased *by more than one third*.

What does this mean for victims?

Without continued support, it means that the availability of services to all victims will be impacted due to a decrease in the number of advocates available to serve them. It means that victims will wait longer for counseling appointments, that advocates will have less time to devote to addressing each victim's specific needs at a time when other community resources have decreased or been eliminated. Responding to crisis interventions such as hotline calls and hospital accompaniments will be delayed due to availability of counselors; victims could be forced to deal with the hospital, police, and courts alone

without an advocate to help them navigate these systems, which can lead to further trauma to victims of sexual violence. The financial cost of a sexual assault is \$110,000. This is based on short term medical care, mental health services, lost productivity, and pain and suffering.¹ Please see the attached document, “Economic Costs of Sexual Assault.”

Sexual assault is not only widespread, but it also has a devastating impact, and recovery from such a trauma requires a long process. Victims experience anxiety, depression, and anger. Nightmares or flashbacks are common. Victims also have difficulties with sleeping or concentrating. Furthermore, substance abuse, eating disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicide are all potential consequences of sexual violence. In the aftermath of sexual assault, victims need support. CONNSACS and its member centers meet this need in a way no one else does—our advocates and volunteers frequently answer calls and get out of bed at 3:00 in the morning to go to the hospital with a victim for three, four, five or more hours. This kind of response is unique to SACS Advocates.

Victims have told us how our services make a difference in their recovery:

One client, a survivor of child sexual abuse, wrote:

This group is a valuable service. I have come to feel that I am not alone as a survivor, as I had felt for years. We tell our stories and others listen with patience and compassion and with occasional feedback comments, often very helpful. This group experience is one of the best.

Another example of the positive impact our SACS Advocate have on victims is as follows: A call came in through the hotline that there were two sisters at the hospital. One had been raped. The other had used SACS (sexual assault crisis services) services in the past and wanted an Advocate there for support. At the hospital, the Advocate explained the process and the victim’s rights to the victim. She explained that she was able to be present for any or all of the process and that she was there for both the victim and her sister. SACS provided them with the support and information they needed to make their own decisions on how they wanted to handle what had happened to their family. After the hospital visit, the Advocate accompanied the sisters to the police department to support them in making a statement. This was very difficult for the sisters, but they said they felt very supported with the Advocate there. In addition, SACS was able to support the sisters to call the police when the perpetrator was subsequently making comments to them, which gave the police enough evidence to get a warrant for harassment against the man. The investigation into the assault continues, as does the support the sisters receive from SACS.

We know that our nine member centers have a high staff turnover rate. We also know that victims we serve identified staff turnover as traumatic to them in their recovery. Some of the specific causes for staff turnover include long hours, no salary increases due to budgetary constraints, little opportunity for advancement, and low pay relative to similar positions with the state, for example. The sad reality is that our staff often feel compelled

¹ Miller, Ted, Mark A. Cohen, and Brian Wiersema. 1996. *Victim Costs and Consequences: A New Look*. National Institute of Justice. U.S. Department of Justice. Washington, D.C.

to choose between doing the important work that they love and leaving for higher paying jobs in other sectors.

We ask for your continued support for those who are working every day with victims and survivors of rape and child sexual abuse, and their families, by preserving our funding. Thank you.